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COUNTRY Indo-China

SUBJECT Territory of Hai-Ninh/The Mungs

CIA

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Source:

1. "Mrs. Yu, Mr. Chang and Mr. Tsai are sitting on the International Bridge that spans the River Ka-long-Ho, weeping as noisily and as deep-chestedly as would hardly be thought possible in grown people. Lacking handkerchiefs, they wipe the tears from their cheeks with their bare forearms. Mrs. Yu is wearing a broad, straw-woven Canton hat with the characteristic knob in the middle, so that her face remains half covered. Mr. Chang has an empty rice bowl beside him; Lord knows what compassionate soul brought him this meal on the bridge. In contrast to the other two, Mr. Tsai has a rather wild look about him. He is squatting barefoot on the cold concrete floor and the frayed ends of his dark blue cotton trousers barely come down over his knees. On the Chinese part of the bridge, exactly at the middle pier, stand six heavily-armed soldiers of the Red Border Patrol of the Province of Kwang-Si, passing the time by frightening the three refugees in such ways as aiming their machine guns at them, clicking their gun locks or calling out to them. I don't understand Cantonese, but judging from the shudders with which Mrs. Yu reacts to each word, they must be talking at least of cutting heads off or roasting people alive on the spit.
2. "On the Vietnam side of the bridge, there are first of all, up in front, the three refugees. Back further stand two members of the 'Garde Territoriale' of the autonomous District of Hai-Ninh. Everytime weapons are aimed on the other side, they discretely withdraw into their guard house. One never knows --. Moreover, the bridge is no mighty structure leaping in heavenly flight across a broad stream, but rather a narrow crossing on which two pony carts can barely pass each other. And the Ka-long-Ho deserves to be called a creek much rather than a river. Yet at the meeting point of two such great countries as China and Vietnam it would probably sound somewhat insignificant to speak of a 'boundary creek.'
3. "Refugees from China arrive daily in Mon-Cay, the northernmost city of the State of Vietnam in Indo-China. It does not seem to be difficult to cross the border at this point, for oddly enough the Ka-long-Ho does not everywhere form this

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political line of demarcation. At the bridge it represents the frontier, which for several years has, so to speak, been 'hermetically' sealed, but no farther than around the next bend, hardly a kilometer away, boats cross the waters and peasants bring vegetables, chickens and grunting pigs in close basket cages from the opposite shore to the market in Mon-Cay. At those points the border seems hardly visible. A few villages still belong to the State of Vietnam. Sometimes China begins at their edge, sometimes on the other side of a piece of farm land. When a Vietnamese official guided me about in that area, he wore his pistol ostentatiously in his belt. 'It can happen only too easily,' he explained, 'that you might unknowingly be standing one leg in China, and the Chinese soldiers are very much on the alert. But sometimes they want to make an arrest on the Vietnam side because they think this is already a part of China. It's always best to have a weapon on you for the involved discussions that follow.' At night, to be sure, an active illegal border traffic is carried on in this rural area. Rice, matches and other goods are smuggled to China. The broad-brimmed Canton hats, for which the inhabitants of the Hai-Ninh District show a particular preference and which are even resold to Haiphong, come from China in the same way. And so, of course, do the refugees. As far away as Nan-Ning, a distant Chinese provincial city, guides are said to offer their services in bringing refugees illegally to Mon-Cay in return for appropriate remuneration.

4. "But anyone who, coming from China, has crossed the Ka-long-Ho is at first only theoretically safe. He is put on the international area of the bridge by the police and has to wait there until his case has been cleared and decided. If it turns out on investigation that, let us say, in the case of Mrs. Yu, Mr. Chang or Mr. Tsin, it is a matter of spies or professional criminals, then they may actually have to go over to the Chinese side of the bridge. In all other cases, however, they are brought to a refugee camp in Haiphong, from where--some day perhaps--they will emigrate.
5. "All this certainly does not sound like peace and yet in Mon-Cay and the surrounding villages, there is such an idyllic peace and quiet as hardly anywhere else in Indo-China. Probably this is due to the Mungs. The Mungs are a people of Chinese origin who live in northeastern Indo-China, between Mon-Cay, Dinh-Lap and Tien-Yen, and on the coastal islands, in a district with its own administration. This area, populated by about 150 thousand Mungs, is called the 'Territoire de Hai-Ninh.' Their sympathy for the French is explained by their traditional rejection of the Vietnamese and the Annamese, under whose imperial might they had stood for centuries. These rulers had already allowed them special rights of autonomy before the Second World War and Colonel Sang, a Mung, has since 1946 united in his person the military and administrative leadership of the district. According to ancient tradition, 'Hai-Ninh,' the land of the Mungs, is a military state led by a colonel or a general. This is to be explained above all on the basis of historical experience. Hai-Ninh had several times been occupied by invading Chinese armies, and even under French rule, pirates coming across the sea from the east in their junkbroke into the well-to-do villages of Hai-Ninh. The Mandarin families of Phan and Huang, who guided the fate of the Mungs for generations and who also subjected themselves to the Annamese imperial house, had introduced this system of military government. Today Colonel Sang is directly responsible to the head of the State of Vietnam, Bao Dai.
6. "In Mon-Cay there is deep and genuine peace. The solidly built little stone houses look almost like toys in their darkness and with the black Cantonese characters against the white of their walls. In the low-built stoves stand batteries of wine and aperitif bottles, which, incidentally, are never lacking anywhere in Indo-China. Tins of Nescafe are set up side by side in long rows. On the market place you can buy your suckling pig or a kilo of fresh worms or dried fish. It smells exactly the same here as in China, that is, of the renowned fish soup. And everything looks as it does in China too: the people, their clothes, their habits. And even the noises of China are the same as those in Mon-Cay: the music ringing out of the entrances to the houses; the clattering wooden sticks advertising in distinctly different

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sounds the merchandise offered by the street vender; the laughter and words of the children. When I was invited to tea with a Hung family, the conversation turned to China. The master of the house thereupon opened the windows and pointed to houses across the way, no more than 30 meters' distant, and said, 'Why, there's China. Look!' Those buildings were already across the border--same architecture, only a bit more dilapidated and poorer-looking. It would have intrigued me to lean out the window for a few hours and watch the daily life of the little Chinese town of Tong-King from this safe observation post. But my hosts did not seem to appreciate the idea. For them this was all a matter of course and everyday route. 'What can you see over there? The picture doesn't offer anything new, does it?'

7. Incidentally, the Hungs don't want to hear of China. Property dispossessions, confiscations of food, money and goods, shortages, the withdrawal of private capital--news of these goings-on has, after all, reached Mon-Cay at first hand and the life of the Hungs has already been steered too much into comfortable middle-class paths for them to be ready to open the gates of their cities to the destitute masses of the largest country of Asia and distribute their possessions among them. The proximity of a Communist frontier evidently has a distinct effect on a population. Besides, the future does not look any too promising for the Hungs as it is. 'Route Coloniale No. 4' leading from Mon-Cay by way of Tien-Yen through the 'hundred-thousand-mountain' region to Langsen, is only usable in a very few places due to the presence of the Viet-Minh troops. Langsen and the places southeast of it have long been in the possession of No Chi-Minh--Mon Cay is the State of Vietnam's last windows looking into China."

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